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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000356

SIPDIS

HQSOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD  
DEPARTMENT PASS TO AID/OTI (RPORTER)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/20/2029  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [AMGT](#) [VE](#)  
SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTRY PROMISES TO RESOLVE  
ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES -- AGAIN

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Classified By: A/POLITICAL COUNSELOR DANIEL LAWTON,  
FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) Summary: On the margins of the March 19 visit of Congressman William Delahunt, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Chief of Staff Temir Porras promised -- again -- to resolve persistent administrative issues impeding Embassy operations. Porras spoke directly with the Charge March 18 and 19 and pledged to oversee the release of both official and personal (POV) eight-cylinder vehicles awaiting customs clearances at the port and the issuance of outstanding permanent change-of-station (PCS) visas, including to members of the Embassy's Defense Attache Office. Charge urged the MFA to agree to the already proposed exchange of diplomatic notes to establish regular, reciprocal diplomatic visa issuances. Porras was receptive to the Charge's proposal that the Venezuelan and U.S. officials work together to facilitate communication on air traffic related to the upcoming Summi of the Americas in nearby Trinidad. The Charge told Porras that he would transmit to Washington the MFA's positive messages but underscored the need for the MFA to put its professed good intentions into action. End Summary.

12. (C) MFA Chief of Staff Temir Porras phoned the Charge late on March 18 to report that he MFA would issue pending visas for U.S. members of the Defense Attache Office. He said he would contact Customs (SENIAT) Director David Cabello on don personally to break the hold on our eight-cylinder vehicles. (Note: There is one official eight-cylinder vehicle and three POVs currently at the port. End Note.) The Charge welcomed the news and asked if the vehicles included privately-owned as well as official cars. Porras responded that he thought all pending cars would be allowed in. Porras agreed to speak with the Charge further while receiving CODEL Delahunt (Septel) March 19 at the airport.

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PORRAS PLEDGES TO RELEASE VISAS  
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13. (C) Charge met with Porras, accompanied by Venezuelan CDA in Washington Angelo Rivero, at the VIP room in Maiquetia Airport on March 19. Porras confirmed that Venezuela would be issuing visas to all pending Defense Attaches. The Charge mentioned a proposal -- already delivered to Rivero in Washington -- to exchange diplomatic notes pledging normal issuance of visas to diplomats assigned to our respective missions. Porras agreed with the idea in principle. He also mentioned that he had heard a "rumor" that during the meeting between President Obama and Brazilian President Lula, Obama

had brought up the visa issue with Lula. (Note: We understand the NSC Advisor raised this issue with the Brazilians in a separate meeting. End Note.) Porras said that President Chavez was surprised when he got this feedback from the Brazilians because Chavez was unaware of the visa problems. Porras confided that after Chavez's intemperate language towards President Obama, he was relieved that the worst that came up was visas.

¶4. (C) Charge noted that all reciprocity problems are a direct result of actions by the MFA's Protocol Office. Porras responded that although such actions may appear deliberate, they were often simply the result of inefficiency in the Venezuelan bureaucracy. He said that he had spoken personally with SENIAT Director Cabello to resolve the eight-cylinder vehicle problem and that Cabello was meeting with an MFA team at that moment to resolve the issue. Porras reiterated that this referred to both official and POVs.

¶5. (C) Congressman Delahunt arrived and joined the group to continue the discussion. Porras said that the MFA had received instructions from Chavez to resolve our administrative issues. Charge reminded Porras that without a written understanding on visa reciprocity, the issue would continue to require high-level attention to resolve. He cited as an example the Embassy's large anticipated personnel turnover in Summer 2009, adding that any visa delay would create a serious bilateral problem. Other issues in the pipeline include the non-issuance of diplomatic license plates to American diplomats and the building of a Marine Security Guard residence on the Embassy compound.

¶6. (C) Rivero commented that he would like diplomatic license plates for his car in Washington and permission to transfer Venezuelan diplomatic personnel from elsewhere in

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his mission to the Venezuelan Consulate in Houston. Porras added that the MFA wanted visas for their Consul General in Puerto Rico and for Venezuelan military personnel seeking to participate in civilian aircraft maintenance and safety training in the United States.

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SUMMIT PLANNING  
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¶7. (C) Turning to the upcoming Summit of the Americas, Porras said he had visited Trinidad March 16 and was concerned about Trinidad and Tobago's logistical preparations. The Charge noted that the USG is working with Port-of-Spain on these issues as well. Given the large logistical footprint of a POTUS visit to Trinidad and its physical proximity to Venezuela, the Charge suggested developing a channel of communication between U.S. and Venezuelan military and civilian aviation representatives to avoid misunderstandings and facilitate contingency planning. Porras agreed and suggested designating a point of contact in Caracas. The Charge suggested that the incoming U.S. Air Attache, if he receives his visa, would be a good interlocutor on this issue.

¶8. (C) Comment: The tone of the Charge's meetings with MFA Chief of Staff Porras was friendly and positive both before and after Representative Delahunt's arrival. It appears that the MFA has received instructions from the Venezuelan president to move ahead on reciprocity issues. At the same time, Porras and other Venezuelan officials candidly expressed frustration with the MFA Chief of Protocol, a position that reports to Porras. It is not clear to us how the Protocol Chief has been able to pursue harassment of Embassy Caracas without higher approval. Porras and other senior Venezuelan officials have previously provided assurances that they would cease harassing Embassy operations, but it remains to be seen whether they can and will deliver. End Comment.

